



# Wakkerstroom Bird Club

P O Box 93, Wakkerstroom 2480 Cell Number 0822556778 E-Mail: [wakkersbirdclub@gmail.com](mailto:wakkersbirdclub@gmail.com)

## NEWSLETTER NUMBER 21 – APRIL 2014

---

### **Claudia Holgate's Talk, Friday 21 March.**

Claudia gave a most interesting talk on Antarctica to an audience of nearly 60 people on Friday night. The audience was treated to a wide-ranging spectrum of excellent photography and detail on the "tube-noses" i.e. those sea birds that have a unique system of processing and excreting saltwater to remove excess brine via tubes, usually above the bill. Other animals were covered as well, several seal species, killer whales, details of the harvesting of krill and its treatment in order to make it suitable for human consumption, including the colouring-up of pink salmon!

Claudia has been to Antarctica 38 or 39 times, she's not sure which, and her enthusiasm certainly shows! We owe Glenn Ramke a big vote of thanks for introducing Claudia to us. The picture shows Glenn and Claudia, after the talk.



### **Upgrade of gates at Iain Drummond Hide**

Thanks to Keith Davidson for making the time and effort available to refurbish the existing round-about gate as well as a sturdy farm gate (donated by Gys Roos) and then installing it at the parking area to the Drummond Hide. The farm gate became necessary as the locks on the old gate we "shared" with Eskom were being frequently broken needing costly replacement. We also need access to transport

materials/tools for maintenance work at the hide. This step will hopefully mean that Eskom will stick with the original gate.

## Digging for Golden Moles in Wakkerstroom

As part of ongoing research into these fascinating yet mysterious creatures, Chanel Rampartab of the University of Cape Town and University of Pretoria is undertaking a field survey of the endangered and endemic Golden Moles. These ancient underground mammals are in fact more closely related to elephants than they are to the common mole rat that digs up people's gardens. Being constantly threatened by land transformation and especially by mining activity, golden moles are quickly disappearing from the Highveld.



Foraging Tunnels

Wakkerstroom has been the focus area for the month of March and Chanel and her team of volunteers from the Endangered Wildlife Trust and the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency have been busy in the town and surrounding farms setting traps for golden moles. As most of the 21 golden mole species are impossible to tell apart based on their appearance, genetics work will be shortly underway to determine the diversity Wakkerstroom holds. They have concluded that Wakkerstroom is currently safeguarding a decent population and hope it stays this way.

If you have seen golden mole activity (see pictures) or have found a dead golden mole on your property, please inform Chanel on [chanel.rampartab@gmail.com](mailto:chanel.rampartab@gmail.com).

## MOLE ART by Judy-Lynn Wheeler

Many of you met Chanel Rampartab, MSc Student from Dept. of Biological Sciences, UCT recently, as she was involved in Golden Mole research in and around our District. We were delighted to have Chanel and Lucky visit our garden where both Golden Mole and Mole Rat occur. During the 'dig' I mentioned we had photographed a very large mound with a fat tower. The photo went to Chanel's supervisor who advised that a large mole *Georchus* does indeed occur in Wakkerstroom. We are keeping an eye out for the unmistakable mounds and will take measurements next time. But here is a pic of "the big one".



## Lorna Stanton's Talk on her Raptor Rehabilitation Centre

Lorna's talk was excellent, beautifully illustrated with her photographs and at the same time a little disturbing. Most people were appalled to see the injuries caused to some birds by neglect, callousness, lack of experience with the proper handling of wild birds, often by well-meaning people. The "repair work" necessary to rehabilitate such birds is considerable and costly and we can only admire her dedication and commitment to the task. Members present made a very useful contribution to the Rehabilitation Centre in thanks for her talk.



Lorna with John Burchmore

## Interesting Local Sightings:

White-browed Sparrow-weaver, 20 March, a single bird was seen and photographed in my garden, at approximately 17h00 on March 20, cleaning up the scant remains of the morning feeding. A dry western species well away from its normal range where the bird and its extremely untidy nest are a common sight. The bird was not seen again. - Brian Guerin.

Grey Crowned Cranes, on 5 April at about 09h50 driving towards the vlei on my way to the Vleimark at De Oude Stasie, I came across two adult birds standing in the middle of Badenhorst Street close to Vlei Street. I brought the car to a halt and watched them for about 5 minutes. Eventually, they made a dignified departure; one to each side of the road. - John Barrow

African Fish Eagle, 7 April. Whilst enjoying the sight of some 50+ South African Shelduck taking off very vocally and colourfully from the vlei I recalled a similar sight once before some time ago – with the same cause. An African Fish Eagle soared quietly over the vlei and created havoc amongst them, he seemed to enjoy their reaction making no attempt to molest them! – Brian Guerin.

## Bird of the Month: Black-shouldered Kite

**Scientific Name/Meaning:** *Elanus caeruleus* = Elanus Greek, Elan is dash or ardour: caeruleus= Latin = blue/bluish, in Afrikaans the bird is called Blouvalk.



Tail raising & lowering

**General:** This dapper little raptor needs little introduction to Wakkerstroomers. If memory serves me correctly this was the most commonly recorded raptor during the course of SABAP 1. It is featured here as Bird of the Month as a corollary to Judy-Lynn Wheeler's exercise to try and establish why their numbers appear to be dropping during successive winter/summer CAR counts.

**Description:** See picture, a distinctive smallish grey and white raptor with a dark shoulder patch and bright red eyes. Approximately 30cm in length and weighing about 250gm, the female is slightly the larger.

**Status/Conservation:** Considered Not Threatened. The Black-shouldered Kite has

benefited from bush clearance for agriculture and from alien trees providing nest sites in otherwise treeless habitats; does not appear to be affected by liberal use of pesticides.

There can be a large turnover of these birds, occasionally 25% in a month, but there is no



Talon grappling

evidence of a seasonal movement. Birds ringed in South Africa have been recovered in Malawi and Uganda. These birds are nomadic rather than migratory.

**Food and Feeding Methods:** Typically hunts by hovering, dropping by stages to catch mostly rodents on the ground but also still-hunt from a perch as hovering takes more energy. Primarily eats rodents, sometimes birds or lizards.

**Habitat:** Occurs in most habitats but is a grassland specialist which avoids closed areas such as thick forests and deserts but may occur in arid/semi-arid areas if there are irrigated fields nearby.

**Breeding:** They are monogamous, solitary and very territorial around the nest site. They tend to nest at the end of the rains to capitalize on prey availability; the young are supplied mostly by the male. A tree-

nester who in our area makes use of large gums and pines, near the canopy. Two to six eggs are laid but most commonly three or four.

### Diary for May

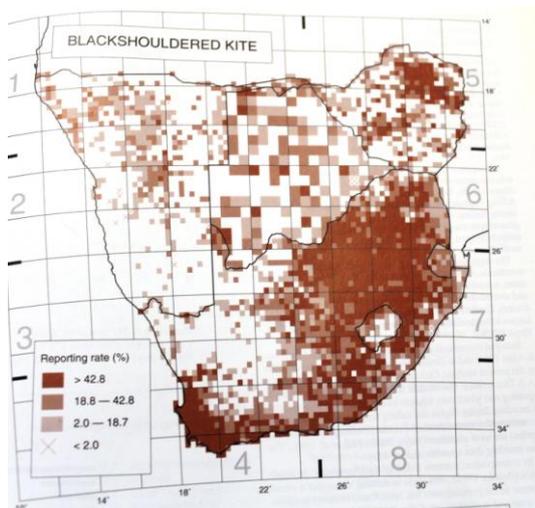
On Saturday, 3 May, we'll do our regular trip to the Vlei. We'll meet at the bridge on the Amersfoort Road from 07h30 onward.

Our outing on 13 May will be to Graham and Judy-Lynn Wheeler's farm "Winds of Song" about 4kms from the Total garage. We're hoping to see 2 Sparrow-hawks species, Black-shouldered Kite, Fork-tailed Drongo and Red-winged Francolin amongst others. We'll meet at the Library at 07h30. Bring something to eat and drink

21 May will herald a showing of "Chasing Birds: a DVD. The film covers the attempts of three teams as they try to tick more birds in the 24 hour period than all the other teams. Australia is home to over 800 species of birds, the film represents the Australian equivalent of our Birding Big Day. 24 straight hours of birding is energy-sapping at the best of times – but with a camera crew tagging along?

### The Birdfeeder opposite "The Little Frame Yard"

Some time ago, John Burchmore founded this birdfeeder and, for a time, provided all the bird feed. As you can appreciate, this is an on-going burden and we are appealing for donations to keep this project going. They can be left at The Crow's Nest



## Sharing Fuel Costs

This is a friendly reminder that we should be sharing transport to minimize the number of vehicles on the outing. Passengers should contribute to the driver's fuel costs. If passengers forget to offer, the driver shouldn't feel shy to ask. The price of petrol is increasing at an alarming rate and it's not fair that drivers pay for all the fuel used.

## Pentad Survey Report

Species Recorded up to last Report 196

Birds added this period

Yellow Wagtail	1	John Burchmore - near Zaaihoek Dam
Lesser Kestrel	1	John Burchmore - on the Volksrust Road
Lesser Striped Swallow	1	Ann Cleal - at the Vlei
Pearl-breasted Swallow	1	Ann Cleal - at the Vlei
White-browed Sparrow-weaver	1	Brian Guerin - in the garden, Loop Street. *
African Rock Pipit	1	Lucky Ngwenya - on Ossewakop

Species Recorded to Week 41 (April 13) 202

\* This record has now been accepted by the ADU, Cape Town.

## A Drone with a View!

On the morning after Lorna Stanton's excellent talk, Penny Burchmore, and I had a fascinating hour or so at the vlei watching Lorna put her drone through its paces. A drone, for the uninitiated like us, is an unmanned flying machine used commonly on spying missions like taking aerial photographs



Lorna's little machine serves the same purpose of taking aerial photographs although with a less sinister purpose! This amazing machine (see pictures) is about 60cm across and resembles a helicopter with two bodies, set at right-angles with a rotor at each corner. It is directed by a control panel and can also rise vertically to a height of 3000metres! The machine is fitted with a Go-Pro camera taking pictures at 14 million pixels giving superb clarity. The rechargeable battery has an operational span in the air of about 10 minutes.

The intention is, inter alia, that Lorna will take some aerial photographs of the vlei for comparison with older photographs to show the extent of exotic invasion. – Brian Guerin

**JOHN BARROW - EDITOR**

# BIRD QUIZ

**Book Now! Limited space!**

**Where: Mucky Duck**

**When: 10<sup>th</sup> May 2014**

**Time: 17h30 / 18h00**

**Four rounds: ID of birds from calls and photographs, Pictionary and a final round of “How well do you know Wakkerstroom?”**

**Please book with Pat on 083 296 5163 ASAP**

**Join us for an evening of fun! A light supper will be served.**

**Prizes to be won**



**Celebrate World Migratory Bird Day 10-11 May 2014**

**“Migratory birds and tourism”**

